

An Errand in the City by ConvenientAlias

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Summary:

Kali happens to live in the same city as Nancy's college. El asks Nancy to deliver a message.

An Errand in the City

Seeking Kali Prasad out was not particularly difficult for Nancy, although it properly should have been. It was more of a casual errand. Her college was in the city Kali lived in, and El asked her if she would stop by and deliver a message on El's behalf.

"Okay," she said. "What's the message?" She frowned. "Actually, how do you know this person?"

"We grew up together." El nervously touched the tattoo on her wrist. "Sort of." She looked over Nancy's shoulder, unwilling to meet her eyes or fully explain herself. "We were separated by the bad men."

El still spoke in simplistic terms when she talked about her past, even though overall her vocabulary had widened in the past year or so. It seemed like the flipping of a switch; she would go from El to Eleven, lab experiment and frightened child. Nancy never knew quite how to handle that, so she left those kinds of conversations to Hopper and Mike and sometimes Joyce Byers. She talked to El about lighter things usually. Practical things.

"I haven't seen her in years."

"Since you were separated?" That would be quite a while. "Do you want me to tell her you're safe?"

"I saw her once last year. Before I came back to fight, I visited the city. We reunited, and she taught me how to use my powers." El levitated a pen from the table thoughtfully, then let it drop. "She helped me but I couldn't stay with her. Can you tell her I'm all right and tell her about my life here? She..." El trailed off.

Nancy reached over and squeezed her hand. "Of course. Do you have her address?"

El smiled. "She doesn't have one."

And that was how Nancy found out her errand would not be visiting someone's apartment but chasing down a gang of misfits in an

alleyway and trying to not get stabbed by a man named Axel. Great.

(Actually, she felt surprisingly excited about it.)

El gave her precise instructions of how to find the hideout over the phone. It was an old, abandoned building, probably condemned. In the old days it used to be a Catholic school and in front there were eroded statues of saints Nancy couldn't identify. Over the door there hung a cross.

Nancy went to the location at midnight, when there would be no one around to see her breaking in and when El had told her Kali and the gang would be around. She scaled the metal gate and dropped to dirt on the other side—she had avoided the brick-covered walkway for a softer landing. But she followed the walkway to the door, where the lock was already broken for her. Broken, no doubt, by Kali herself or one of the others. Inside it was dark, but she had brought a flashlight, and there were windows that brought in a little light from the streets as well.

El had told her, “The top floor.” There were four flights of stairs. She tried to keep her footsteps light, but they seemed to echo too loudly until she reached the second floor. Then she heard voices from a distance. And when she got to the top floor, she no longer needed El’s instructions. She followed the voices to a closed door.

She knocked.

The voices went silent. She strained her ears for footsteps and heard only light padding. The door swung open fast and a hand yanked her inside by the arm, shoving her in and closing the door behind her. It was a tall man, spiked Mohawk dyed green. He snarled at her and began to speak but she turned away from him to the other three people in the room, which was lit by a larger flashlight, practically a lantern. A black man, big but calm, sat facing the door with an impassive expression. A tall, thin black girl with large hair stood with an Indian girl with dyed purple hair. She had a hand on the Indian girl’s shoulder and stood with her body angled out towards Nancy, a buffer between the two.

The Indian girl had to be Kali.

The white man standing at her side jabbed her in the ribs with his fist and she squealed and stumbled backwards, then glared at him. He said, “Did you even hear anything I said?”

“I’m here to talk to Kali Prasad,” she said. Her voice trembled even though inside she felt completely still, still as stone. “Number eight.”

Kali—because yes, it had to be her—pulled away from the black girl (Mick, El had called her) and took a step forward. Dead-voiced, she said, “I will not be called by a number, whoever you are.”

“El sent me.”

“Who?”

“Eleven.”

“You will call her *Jane*. ”

“She doesn’t go by Jane anymore,” Nancy said. “I’m a friend of hers.”

“Prove it.”

El had given her the only object she had from Kali, a now-worn stick of eyeliner. Nancy produced it from her pocket. Axel snatched it away and handed it to Kali, who examined it closely and said that anyone could get such an object at a drug store.

“She said you’re fond of butterflies,” Nancy said.

Kali cocked her head. “I am.”

“I really am her friend. And I’d like to be yours. She told me to tell you she’s fine. I have news...”

They sat her down at one of the many abandoned desks in the classroom. Her chair had a wobbly leg and tilted back and forth depending on how she leaned her weight. She told Kali, and her listening friends, how El had returned to Hawkins and how she was living peacefully now. She had even entered the junior high.

“She should not have done that.”

“Why not? She’s as normal as everyone else.”

“Brenner will not give up looking for her because she wants to play house,” Kali said sharply. “She thinks she’s safe.” She crossed her arms. “And people like you contribute to that delusion.”

“The labs won’t target her. They’re under new management.” Nancy explained the scandal surrounding Barb’s death.

Kali said she’d already heard about it in the news. “That won’t stop individuals. And it won’t stop them from reforming underground.” She put her hand in her pocket, then fished it out again. “Still, you did a good job working through the law. I suppose that makes you a bit like us.” She smiled slightly. “We also work for justice.”

“It was a clever plan,” Mick said. She’d been hovering over Kali’s shoulder this whole time, though not speaking except occasionally. She smiled too. “About time someone took them down officially! You can’t count on the law but if you can work it in your favor...”

“It’s impressive,” Kali said. She leaned back, resting some of her weight on Mick. “Of course, prison is too good for many of them.”

“I heard you thought that way.”

Mick let out a rough laugh. Kali said, “We do.”

Nancy shrugged. “Well, I don’t know what you guys do. I only wanted to tell you about El.”

“It’s good to hear she’s doing well. But if you say you can protect her, you had better keep it up,” Kali said. She leaned forward, into Nancy’s face. “That girl trusts you.”

“We’re all there for her.”

“Good. She needs someone.” Kali nodded. “Good.”

Abruptly, she turned and left the room. Mick glanced at the others and hurried out behind her. Leaving Nancy with Axel, Mick and Dottie.

“Wanna play cards?” Dottie asked. “We’ve got a good pot going.”

“I don’t have much on me,” Nancy said.

“Play for nothing, just for you.”

“Okay.”

She stayed another hour for small talk and poker, hoping Kali would return. Kali didn’t. Eventually she had to leave—it would be harder to get out of the locked gateway undetected during the daytime.

She’d told the group her name and the college she went to and let them know they could contact her if they wanted to, but she didn’t expect anything to come of it, especially when a few weeks passed and she didn’t hear from or see them. She was surprised to come back to her dorm room one day in November to find not only Kali but Mick as well sitting on her unmade bed.

Her roommate was over at her desk and gave her a look of intense annoyance.

“Hi, guys,” Nancy said. “This is, um, this is Cat, my roommate. Catherine, these are Kali and Mick. They’re my friends.”

“They said so,” Cat said. “Look, I don’t care who the fuck they are but can you get out? I have a date in twenty.” And Cat hated Nancy being around when her boyfriend came to pick her up.

“Sure, yeah. Come on...guys...”

On the street outside the dorm, Mick said, “We’re sorry to bother you. Your roommate seems like a jerk.”

“She’s okay. It really depends.” Nancy shifted her weight. “So, uh, can I help you guys?”

"We thought you'd be going home over Thanksgiving break soon," Kali said.

This was true. Thanksgiving break was in a week, and Nancy would be back in Hawkins for a month. She was looking forward to it. She wanted to see Steve and ask him how college was for him. Same with Jonathan, although she'd broken up with him before leaving in September. Long distance relationships were too much for her, and she felt she'd grown out of him. But they were still friends. And she wanted to see Mike, too, and, well, everyone. She'd been homesick, and long distance phone calls cost so much money.

"Kali would like to go home with you," Mick said.

"I'd like to see Jane—El," Kali corrected herself. "Especially if she's been doing well. I don't know if she'd like to see me, but..."

"I'm sure she would," Nancy said. She'd only talked to El about Kali once but El had seemed so fond, and a little bit wistful too. "I, uh... yeah, I'd have to check with my parents, but you could come home with me."

"I'd be coming too," Mick said. Her gaze said she would stand her ground on this.

Kali glanced up at her. "You don't need to."

"I want to see the wasteland of suburbia for myself," Mick said. "You promised." And she put an arm around Kali's waist. Her hand settled on Kali's hip, and Kali leaned into her side.

It was so easily intimate that Nancy forgot what she was talking about for a moment, looking at that hand. Then she realized Mick and Kali were waiting for her to speak and she coughed and said, "Well, I'll ask. Can you come back in a couple days and I can...or I can come see you."

"Yeah, come on over. The guys and Dottie liked playing cards with you," Mick said. "It'll be a party."

"Okay."

She called home that day and said she would be bringing two classmates home who lived out of state and couldn't afford to go home. Warned that one of them was black and one of them was Indian and could they please not react. Her parents said of course that was fine, and they would be fine, why did Nancy always worry about these things? They'd love to meet some of her girl friends. She hadn't had a close girl friend since Barbara—they didn't say that, but it hung in the air. They had been encouraging her to be more social ever since, well, ever since.

Yeah, good, fine. Yes she was making friends. These were very nice girls, they would love them. Bye Mom, Bye Dad.

She realized after she'd hung up that she'd forgotten to tell them to warn El. So she called Hopper and let him know in a brief conversation. El was out playing, and he said he'd tell her. So that would be fine too.

She felt a bit like a matchmaker. It was bound to be an interesting Thanksgiving.

Later that week, she went to play cards at the old school. But when she went in, she couldn't find them anywhere. The room they had been in before was deserted, though it still had marks of civilization: mugs and paper plates, blankets, the deck of cards sitting on one of the desks, an obscene drawing on the blackboard. It was a Saturday night and Nancy had nowhere to be, so she leaned against the wall with one of their blankets and waited for them. She didn't realize she had fallen asleep until glaring daylight coming through the windows woke her up, as well as the quiet buzz of voices. The gang was back.

"We had business last night," Dottie explained.

"Oh." Nancy stared at them. They were all bustling around, doing morning chores or eating breakfast. Maybe they had killed a man last night; she wasn't sure she wanted to know. "Did it go well?"

"As well as you could expect," Funshine said. Axel laughed.

"We achieved the objective," Kali said coolly. She was drinking a cup of something warm. "What more can you ask for?"

“A lot,” Mick said. “You nearly got us shot, Kali.”

“But I didn’t.”

“Almost.”

“There are no holes in you that nature didn’t put there,” Kali said. “Come on. Can’t you forgive me?” She quirked her eyebrows at Mick, who huffed a laugh. “Don’t be mad at me.”

Funshine brought over a cup and a pot of chai, which was apparently what Kali was drinking. Nancy took it willingly and drank. “Does this place have a bathroom?”

“Right down the hall.”

They gave her brunch, too, and told her about last night’s business, avoiding the actual death involved—though Axel tried to talk about it, Kali hushed him every time. Nancy listened, but she was distracted. Distracted by how Kali and Mick were both sitting on top of the same tiny desk, snuggled against each other, and sometimes one would turn to murmur in the other’s ear.

Close friendship, she told herself. *Like you and Barb*. But...not really. There was something different about them, about the way their bodies touched. It was a different kind of intimacy. They didn’t look like Nancy and Barb. They looked more like Nancy used to look with Steve. And at one point, Mick even kissed Kali’s head, on the shaved spot beside her ear.

Nancy shivered a little.

But she tried to make casual conversation. And she thanked them for the brunch. It was an apple and a raw English muffin with peanut butter, but she was hungry enough to enjoy it.

“Do you like waffles?” she asked Kali.

“I have no strong feelings on them.”

“El really likes Egggoes.”

"Does she."

"Yeah, so I was just wondering. Maybe she'll give you some when you visit."

"Maybe." Kali smiled.

"Waffles," Mick said. "How nice."

Although Jonathan never came over to visit, the breakup still too fresh, he went to college a couple towns over. He was the one who picked Nancy up from her dorm, and Kali and Mick with her. He said, "So you're Nancy's friends?"

(Unfazed at their rough look—he knew Nancy had a type.)

"Actually, they're El's friends," Nancy said.

"El has friends?"

No one had ever explained the situation to Jonathan. Kali explained her relationship to El now. "We were experiments together. Until we both escaped." Her descriptions were bleak and brief. Nancy wanted to touch her, to comfort her, tell her she didn't need to talk about it. She looked back and saw Mick was already offering her a hug, which she did not accept.

Jonathan listened in silence. He did not offer an opinion. Nancy supposed it was partly his awkwardness around girls and partly that there really wasn't that much for him to say. Kali laid it out brutally, and she would not accept condolences for a dead childhood. Congratulations on living, on killing her oppressors, she might accept, but nothing less, and she had not mentioned her quest for vengeance. Probably didn't trust a stranger with it, whether El trusted him or not.

He dropped them all off at Nancy's house. Her parents greeted them.

Mike gave her a reluctant hug and gave Kali and Mick a curious look. Her mom and dad also hugged her and shook Kali and Mick's hands. They looked the most taken aback at Kali's haircut, her makeup and her leather jacket.

They only had one guest bedroom but the bed was large. Nancy led them there and watched them put their things down. She said, "I hope you like the room."

"A real bed." Mick bounced up and down a couple times and grinned. "I can already feel the softness of suburbia creeping into my skin."

"You'll be thoroughly corrupted," Kali said with a little laugh. She kissed Mick on the cheek, careless of Nancy, who looked away quickly. Then she stood. "I'd like to see Jane now, please."

"It's almost dinnertime."

"You can give me directions to their house."

"My mom and dad will think it's weird if you don't stay for dinner."

Kali sat back down. "All right. I would like to see Jane tomorrow."

"You will."

Through dinner they came up with anecdotes from a fake shared past, easily bouncing off each other. Sometimes Nancy would be telling a real story and Mick would casually break in and correct her on a detail to make the story inaccurate. Kali fabricated entirely false tall tales about shared classes, which she was sure to tell Nancy's parents she was acing.

The next day Nancy led them over to Hopper's place. Mike ran ahead to tell El they were all coming. She was waiting on the porch, sitting on the front step.

Kali stopped a yard away from her. "Jane."

El also seemed frozen.

Mick was the one to step forward first. She offered El her hand and

leveraged her up from the steps, a handshake and an arm at once. “Good to see you again, kid. Nice to see you weren’t caught by the lab for any more freaky experiments.”

“You shouldn’t call her a freak.” Kali was touchy.

El shook the hand willingly. “I’ve been fine.” She walked hesitantly to Kali. “Hi.”

Kali said, “Hi.”

Slowly, they wrapped their arms around each other. Despite their hesitation, they hugged each other hard, and it was a long moment before they let go.

“Maybe you two should catch up together,” Nancy said. “Mick and I can go for a walk.”

So they walked away. They could hear Mike and El beginning to talk, Kali still silent. Then, as they gained more distance, there was only the sound of breaking sticks and crunching leaves under their feet.

“You won’t get lost?” Mick asked.

“We’ll just walk straight back. And I know these woods.”

Mick hummed. “The forests of suburbia.”

“We’re more rural than suburban,” Nancy pointed out. But Mick was still enchanted. She found a stump and stood on top of it, looking out as if she had climbed a mountain. Nancy giggled. The stump still had a little space on it and she climbed on top behind Mick and put her hands on Mick’s high shoulders.

Mick jumped down but stopped Nancy from doing the same. “Get on my back.”

“What?”

“Get on my back.”

Nancy did.

"I'm good at piggy back rides," Mick said. "I give them to Dottie, but she moves too much. Kali acts like it's beneath her." She shifted Nancy's weight. "Do you think Jane's giving her a chance?"

"I think El's missed her a lot."

"She ran out on Kali, you know. Kind of messed her up. But. She's just a kid, I don't think she got it."

"I think she got it. But she wanted to come back to us."

"Maybe." Mick set Nancy down. "You have a nice place here. Hopefully it doesn't make Kali sad, seeing that. We're family too, but I think she'd like to have a place like that."

"She could."

"No," Mick said. "She couldn't."

Nancy was unsure what to say. "Um...I do think she's happy with you though."

Mick shrugged. "Kali doesn't know how to be happy."

When they got back to Kali and El, Kali's eyeliner and mascara was a mess but she was grinning. They went inside and ate waffles with syrup, cooked in (Kali was amused) a real toaster rather than left raw. They talked. El and Mike and Nancy told about school, Kali about other news (not related to murder for the most part, at least explicitly), and the conversation continued until Hopper came home and Nancy had to go home for dinner.

That night she came to her bedroom to find Kali and Mick sitting on her bed. They didn't notice her come in because they were too wrapped up in each other—specifically, in each other's lips, with a little bit of tongue involved too. Nancy was about to leave for a while when Kali broke away. "Nancy! Sorry. We were waiting for you."

"You could get in trouble if someone caught you doing that," Nancy said.

"*I am* trouble," Kali said. Mick giggled slightly. "I wanted to thank

you for helping me to see El.”

Not calling her Jane anymore, then. “You’re welcome.”

Kali and Mick stood. Kali paused in front of Nancy and then rested a hand on her shoulder for a long moment before leaving, Mick trailing behind her.

It had been a productive day. Nancy went to bed.

They all drove back with Jonathan, and Nancy didn’t see Kali, Mick or any of the gang for a couple weeks. She stopped by before Christmas break to invite them to come home with her again.

Kali said, “We can’t.”

“We could host you...”

“We went home with you for Thanksgiving so we wouldn’t be intruding. Now if we wanted to visit, we have the truck. But we can’t.”

“Why not?”

Kali shrugged. “I don’t live the same life as El. I can’t keep breaking in on it.”

“El loves you.”

“I have a job. She doesn’t want to be involved in it. So, I will stay away.”

Nancy nodded. There seemed to be nothing left to say. But as she turned to go, Mick said, “Hey, don’t be a stranger.”

Nancy turned back.

“You know you’re free to visit any time.” Mick walked over and

slowly tucked a piece of hair behind Nancy's ear. She winked.

Nancy blushed.

Kali frowned. "Don't be a tease, Mick." To Nancy, she added, "But really, you can visit anytime. We appreciate what you've done for us."

Nancy nodded.

She thought she would probably visit again soon. And she hoped Kali would rethink her decision to avoid El. Kali was missing something. It was hard to pinpoint what. But Nancy hoped she and El could change that. Until then, she would leave it to Mick.

Author's Note:

Originally I set out to write a Kalancy fic, but Kali/Mick is my real OTP and it carried me away. Ah well. Hope you enjoyed. Comments are much appreciated!